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Troubled spaces: negotiating school–community boundaries in northern Nigeria.

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Abstract

Community participation is a vital component of the educational decentralisation policies that are now widespread in Nigeria. In this paper, we explore school-community relations in different localities in northern Nigeria, where there is both very little inter-generational experience of schooling and minimal engagement by local communities in social and political management processes. Drawing on ethnographic data in and around six primary schools in Adamawa State, northern Nigeria, we problematise school–community relations and highlight the complexities and tensions in their social interactions. This we do by focusing on the school boundary that both connects and distinguishes it from the surrounding community. In particular, we draw on Foucault (1991) and Massey (1994, 2005) to explore the agonistic spatial and temporal regulation that operates at the school boundary, with specific attention to the different ways that students, teachers and the community comply or resist such strategies of governmentality. In concluding, we argue that it is imperative to think through the implications for/of international education and development policies as they are launched in diverse localities. This would help to avoid accounts of local deficit that are so readily invoked when top-down policies reach communities.

Key words: community participation; decentralisation; space; temporality; school boundaries; Nigeria; Sub-Saharan Africa.

Introduction

Since the end of military rule in 1999, the drive to improve educational access and quality in Northern Nigeria, as in many other parts of Sub-Saharan Africa, has taken place in a policy context of increasingly decentralised school governance (Geojaja 2004; Adediran 2015). Parental and community participation is an important aspect of this policy process (Carr-Hill et al. 2018), which has simultaneously established the idea of schools as community institutions. Alongside this, infrastructural development and advocacy campaigns have been launched to persuade parents from communities without extended experience of schooling to enrol their children in school. Despite these efforts, nationally primary school attendance has risen slowly from 60% to only 68% since 2002 and well over eight million school-age children are still estimated to be out of school across Nigeria (see www.data.uis.org). In addition, large regional disparities exist, with the northern states – particularly in the North East and North West zones – performing far below those in the south on almost all educational indicators (NPC and RTI International 2016).

Several government and donor-funded education initiatives have focused on basic education in northern states to address the above disparities. Many include programme components aimed at boosting community involvement in schooling, with the ultimate goal of increasing pupil enrolments – especially of girls – and improving the quality of education (Humphreys with Crawford 2014). The intention of this paper is to explore practice at the local level, to make visible some of the complexities and heterogeneity of school–community relations in different contexts, with particular focus on the school boundary, drawing out the wider implications for policy on educational decentralisation. We do this through an analysis of qualitative data from systematic, mixed-methods ethnographic case-study research that looked at access and school quality in primary education in Adamawa State in North East Nigeria (Dunne et al. 2013).

Within the context of limited inter-generational experience of schooling, we explore the social geographies of the school and the work of the school boundary in school–community relations. Our analysis draws on Foucault’s (1991) concepts of governmentality and ‘dividing practices’. This provides us with a theoretical basis to understand the invitation to community participation in schools as a strategy of governmentality that establishes schools as community organisations and simultaneously works as a ‘dividing practice’ between them. Then using Doreen Massey’s (1994, 2005) concept of ‘power geometries’ we explore the spatial and temporal boundaries of the school that both connect and distinguish it from the surrounding community. In particular, we highlight the ways in which the school demarcates its boundaries and examine the agonistic relations and social tensions produced, as community members legitimate and/or contest these spatial and temporal demarcations.

In the next section, we set out the policy context that outlines the modes and purposes of community participation in schools in Nigeria, and in the Global South more generally. We then highlight the problematics of community participation with reference to previous research, before presenting the theoretical framings which inform our analysis. Following this, we describe the empirical research and data collection before turning to our analytical discussion, organised in three overlapping strands. Firstly, we explore the formal school-based fora for community participation – the Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) and School-Based Management Committee (SBMC) – across the six case-study schools. Secondly, we describe the differences in school perimeters and their use in regulating and enclosing the school space. Thirdly we further highlight the work of school boundaries as axes of regulation and sites of significant school–community tension and community resistance.

Critics of educational policy-making in the Global South have noted that policy-makers and planners often pay insufficient attention to the intricacies, cultures and dynamics of local contexts (Walker and Dimmock, 2002; Chisholm and Leyendecker, 2009). In emphasising the significance of the local as integral to all policy processes and the achievement of intended outcomes, we hope to counter a tendency in development discourse to find deficit in local populations when policy initiatives seem to fail (see for example, Banerjee et al. 2006; Beasley and Huillery 2017). We conclude with an overview of our analysis and some implications for processes of educational policy development.

Policy context: community participation and decentralisation in Nigeria

Echoing wide-scale international trends (Naidoo 2002; De Grauwe et al. 2005; Dickovick and Riedl 2010) promoted in particular by the World Bank (Carney 2009; Edwards 2012), Nigeria has pursued decentralised policies in education since the 1970s (Ikoya 2007; Theobald et al. 2007). A core feature of this has been the promotion of community participation in school governance, principally through the introduction in 2005 of SBMCs (Poulsen 2009; Adediran 2010, 2015). Importantly, SBMCs have a formally recognised school management function (Geojaja 2004; Poulsen 2009), unlike Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), which largely operate through parent volunteers contributing to fund-raising and school building works. In Nigeria, SBMCs should comprise up to 19 representatives (at least 6 adults to be female) from the community and school, which should include teachers and pupil representatives and may also include parents (Adediran and Bawa 2009). SBMC activities include promoting community ‘ownership’ of the school, ‘sensitising’ or ‘educating’ parents and communities about the value of schooling, increasing pupil enrolment – especially of girls – and helping to monitor school quality (Poulsen 2009). As a result, improvements in community mobilisation, school access and school quality have been recorded (UNICEF 2012). However, significant government and donor inputs have been necessary and in schools and states where such support is lacking, SBMCs are scarcely functioning (Antoninis 2010; Little and Lewis 2012; Pinnock 2012; UNICEF 2012; Renteria Lozano and Adebo 2017).

Despite the widespread implementation of decentralisation, research in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia provides evidence of only limited success in terms of improvements in school access and quality (Edwards 2012). Case studies and reviews illustrate multiple obstacles confronting attempts to decentralise services (Naidoo 2002; Jutting et al. 2004; De Grauwe et

al. 2005; Dunne, Akyeampong and Humphreys 2007; Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009). Some research has related the difficulties to lack of resources or the absence of an incentive structure to motivate accountability and transparency (Colclough 1994; World Bank 2001). Others indicate strongly that the top-down nature of the policy formation and implementation negatively affects participation (Therkildsen 2000; Geojaja 2004; Yamada 2014; Snilstveit et al. 2016; Nishimura 2017); they call for better understanding of the social and cultural aspects of contexts through in-depth case-study analysis (Nishimura 2017). The study reported on here responds to this call for more nuanced research into the localities in which national and international policies are realised.

Issues surrounding community participation

Defining the school community is itself problematic, and rarely elaborated in educational policy documents. The community is not necessarily tightly bound geographically to a school, as community members may be drawn from some distance away (Rose 2003; Pryor 2005). It is often fragmented and diverse rather than unified and idealised (Guijit and Shah 1998; Soudien and Sayed 2004), with a changing membership, especially in areas of high migration (Pryor 2005). Although we use the simplified singular term ‘community’ primarily to refer to the geographical community immediately surrounding the school, we acknowledge the multi-layered, fluid and heterogeneous nature of any community. In our research context, ‘community’ includes a subset of parents/guardians in the geographical vicinity, but also others who may live further away and who geographically may also be members of other school communities (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Yamada 2014).

Formal community participation in school activities is usually channelled through the PTA or SMBC, which across the Global South are frequently dominated by local male elites (Barrera-Osorio et al. 2009; Poulsen 2009; Edwards 2012; Yamada 2014; Central Square Foundation 2015), including those with more free time and higher levels of education (Swift-Morgan 2006). There is a noted tendency for these members to see problems of education more from the school’s perspective than from the community’s (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011). In contrast, the ‘ordinary’ community member is often impeded from genuine participation in school management due to their low levels of formal education, poor literacy and numeracy, insufficient available time and lack of political bargaining power (UNESCO 2008). This is especially the case in more marginalised rural areas and among females (PROBE 1999; Boyle et al. 2002; Vasavi 2003; Ahmed and Nath 2005; Dunne, Akyeampong and Humphreys 2007).

The most recent education survey for Nigeria shows that nationally only 47% of parents and guardians are literate¹ with averages in rural areas much lower (26%) and similarly low in the North West (25%) and North East (28%) (NPC and RTI International 2016). Across the nation, women have higher rates of illiteracy, fewer years of formal schooling, poorer economic, health and educational outcomes, all of which are further exacerbated in northern Nigeria (British Council 2012).

It is also worth pointing out here that the rigid spatial, temporal and organisational regimes (timetable, uniform, curriculum, language, discipline etc.) that characterise school operations are often outside the daily life experiences of many within the community (PROBE 1999; Dunne and Adzahlie-Mensah, 2015). Similarly, the school's rhythms and needs are at odds with those of communities and families, especially in rural areas and at particular times of the year (Dunne and Adzahlie-Mensah, 2015). The poorest families may be unable to contribute to, or participate in, school development, nor spare their children time to go to school at particular times of year due to the seasonal demand for family labour (Boyle et al. 2002). In North East Nigeria, therefore, it is hardly surprising that only around a third of parents have made one or more visits to school (NPC and RTI International 2011).

In general terms, community participation is framed asymmetrically and largely in respect to what the community can do to support the school. Similarly, parents are often held responsible for poor school attendance with little recognition of the ways conditions within school might contribute to this (Humphreys with Crawford 2014). Parents and communities are frequently constructed in deficit by schools, teachers and local authorities as being irresponsible, poor, ignorant of the importance of school and/or uninterested (Sherry 2008; Little and Lewis 2012; Pinnock 2012). Even when communities are given space to communicate their concerns to the school, those that question or challenge the primacy of the school's needs are often marginalised and/or denigrated (Sherry 2008; Pinnock 2012). This works to undermine and limit community participation, especially in contexts like Adamawa, with low parental literacy rates and limited experience in such fora (Marphatia et al. 2010). Nevertheless, in some contexts in Sub-Saharan Africa, parents have expressed their dissatisfaction with teachers and schools in other ways, such as by not enrolling or by withdrawing their children from school

¹ Being categorised as literate in this case only requires recognition of one or more simple words on flashcards in English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba or Arabic.

(Boyle et al. 2002; Suzuki 2002). Communities can also refuse to support the school financially, or not provide accommodation for teachers if they feel that the school is not fulfilling its obligations (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Taniguchi and Hirakawa 2016).

Despite the centrality of community participation in the roll-out of educational decentralisation, the literature reviewed above highlights multiple issues and challenges associated with the policy as it is enacted in particular contexts.

Theoretical framings

Central to our analysis is a conceptual understanding of policy as being realised in interaction with different social, political and cultural contexts (Ball 1994, 1998).

Policy is both text and action, words and deeds; it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always incomplete in so far as they relate to or map onto a wild profusion of local practice. (Ball 1994, 10)

Within this theorisation, we are interested in how formal and informal school–community interactions play out in different localities in northern Nigeria, where there is both very little inter-generational experience of schooling and minimal engagement of local communities in social and political management processes (Dunne et al. 2013; Roelofs 2017). The architecture of educational decentralisation in Nigeria is a hierarchical administrative system from Federal to State Universal Basic Education Boards (SUBEBs) to Local Government Authorities (LGAs) to SBMCs in schools. Community participation in schools is integral to this policy vision. It is supported by a regime of rationality that has been constructed around schooling, progress and modernisation (Foucault 1979; Massey 2005), proclaimed and amplified in international development goals (see The Sustainable Development Goals, UNESCO 2016). This same developmental logic draws together aspirations for improved democracy alongside educational imperatives for universal school access and quality education as a supporting rationale for decentralisation (Khanal 2013; Nishimura 2017).

As a strategy of governmentality, the invitation for community participation in formal education both establishes schools as community organisations while simultaneously functioning as a ‘dividing practice’ between them (Foucault 1991). Such techniques of bordering, in this case the imposition of a school boundary that demarcates the school space, aim to naturalise, fix and stabilise differences that are nevertheless always agonistic sites of

struggle (Foucault 1991; De Genova 2017). Focusing on the unpredictable ‘diffusion’ of decentralisation policy in different locales, we explore these struggles and the ways that schools as objects of educational governance produce disciplinary regimes, command compliance and provoke resistance within communities (Foucault 1979), with important implications for policy-making. Our analysis makes visible the regimes of regulation that construct the formal (SBMC/PTA) and informal (everyday interactions) interface between school and community.

We also apply Doreen Massey’s (2005) concept of ‘power geometries’ to the school, examining the shifting social relations around its establishment within a community and the openness / closure of its space. The school boundary constitutes an axis of spatial segregation between those who have legitimated access to school grounds and those who have not, while imposing temporal regimes, such as the timetable, that further regulate the flow of people into and within the school (Dunne and Adzahlie-Mensah 2015; Humphreys et al. 2015). In this paper, we consider ways in which the school boundary operates as both a normalising and disciplinary technique in the school and community. In particular, we examine the complex power struggles and community resistance to the spatial and temporal enclosure of the school.

The research

The data and analysis in this paper are drawn from systematic, mixed-methods ethnographic case-study research on educational access, quality and outcomes carried out in Adamawa State, North East Nigeria. To attend to social and political sensitivities in the context, the research team consisted of three Nigerian researchers (one female and Muslim and two males, one Muslim, one Christian) supported by two UK-based researchers (both female and Christian). The study was also guided by a research steering committee, which comprised the predominantly male and Muslim senior management of the Adamawa State Universal Basic Education Board (ADSUBEB).

Context

Adamawa has been designated as an Educationally Disadvantaged State. It spreads over just less than 40,000km², bisected by the River Benue, with Cameroon on its eastern border. The population of over 3.1 million constitutes one of the country's most ethnically and linguistically

diverse states, characterised as having low levels of adult literacy² (NPC and ICF International 2013) and low (but improving) participation in formal schooling³ (NPC and RTI International 2011, 2016). About half the population, and mostly men, are involved in subsistence and cash-crop agriculture, and a further one third, predominantly women, are engaged in trading. There are nomadic communities, some herding cattle and other riverine communities involved in fishing (UNFPA 2010). Access to clean water and basic services is limited, especially for poorer, more rural people, a situation which in recent years has been exacerbated by the spreading impact of the Boko Haram insurgency (ACAPS 2015).

Histories of limited community engagement, coupled with high proportions of first-time schooled children, and parents without any experience of schools have presented considerable challenges to establishing the local management of schools and increasing school access. In 2010, in response to very low educational participation rates, ADSUBEB embarked on an ambitious development programme aimed at increasing enrolment in basic education, especially of girls. In addition, ADSUBEB funded this study to provide an evidence base for how schools, communities and Local Government Education Authorities (LGEAs) were working together to support increased access and improved quality in order to inform future educational policy and planning, as well as to help develop research capacity within the state.

Methodology

The in-depth ethnographic case studies involved observations in and around six primary schools and interviews with three main groups of local stakeholders: LGEAs, schools and communities, including parents and other community representatives. Statistical data were also collected from the schools and LGEAs. Two schools were selected from each senatorial district in the state, resulting in a deliberate mix of schools in terms of size, rural/urban location and the religious composition of the intake. Five schools had a predominantly Muslim population and the sixth school (Kanti⁴) was wholly Christian. Of the four urban schools, two were located in the state capital (Metropolis and Kilfi), whereas the other two (Domingo and Baobab) were provincial urban schools. The two rural schools (Kanti and Doya) had small intakes of 500–

² 65.5%, with literacy measured as the ability to read part or all of a sentence in one of the Nigeria's three main languages: Igbo, Hausa, and Yoruba.

³ Primary NAR in Adamawa rose from 58% in 2010 to 79% in 2015.

⁴ All school names have been changed.

700 pupils, whereas the urban sites had larger school populations of over 1000, with Baobab's topping 3,000 pupils.

Semi-structured individual or group interviews were held with teachers and head teachers, and gender-segregated group interviews were held with pupils in all schools. Views were also sought from community members, ranging from PTA and SBMC members to ordinary parents and community leaders, as well as LGEA officials. Supplementary state-level interviews were also undertaken with various SUBEB office holders, while opportunistic informal talks were held with out-of-school young people, school hawkers, market traders etc. Multiple visits were made to each school over a period of several months.

Limitations to the data include restricted access to more marginalised parents or community members, especially women; respondents tended to live in the school vicinity, or were accessed through school contacts. Another potential limitation was the fact that ADSUBEB was the sole funder of the research project and the research findings needed approval by their steering committee prior to publication. However, despite some initial reservations about what should be put in the public domain, the committee agreed to leave the original findings intact.

Observation and interview schedules focused on issues of school access and educational quality, and the relations between stakeholders in schools, communities and LGEAs. Interviews were held in either Hausa or English according to respondent preference. With the respondent's permission, these were recorded where possible.

Data gathering and analysis overlapped as interviews were listened to more than once, to enable thick description (Geertz 1973). Observation and interview data for each school case were analysed in an iterative process according to thematic analytical grids that focused on interactions among the three main stakeholder groups. The initial themes emerged from engagement with the substantive and methodological literature and through discussions among team members. These themes were then refined following subsequent data gathering and preliminary case-study analysis, and included school–community relations, which we discuss in this paper. Initial case-study analysis was followed by a cross-case analysis.

School–community relations

Our discussion focuses on three inter-related aspects of school–community relations. We start with community participation in the official school-based fora, SBMCs and PTAs, across the case-study schools. Following this, we examine the school boundary and the imposition of a range of regulatory strategies by the school to restrict community access to the school space. We then consider the multiple ways in which community members openly contested boundary regulations as they made repeated incursions into the school domain.

Formal participation: PTAs and SBMCs

The formal bodies instituted to enable communications between school and community on school-related matters were the PTA and the SBMC, which have distinct functions. SBMCs have officially sanctioned powers to make decisions about the running, management and development of the school, staff and pupils. Despite state-wide workshops in Adamawa to support SBMCs' development, considerable confusion remained about the distinction between SBMCs and PTAs within the state, even at the LGEA-level.

Interview accounts from education officials acknowledged that in Adamawa, SBMCs were largely not operational. This was substantiated in the school case-study interviews in which none of the parents and very few other community members mentioned SBMCs. Nevertheless, committees had nominally been formed in the six schools, though they lacked the requisite adult female and student representation (Dunne et al. 2013). The absence of operational SBMCs has been pointed out in earlier research in northern Nigeria (Poulsen 2009; Antoninis 2010; Unterhalter and Heslop 2011) and echoed in a more recent World Bank-sponsored national consultation (Renteria Lozano and Adebo 2017)⁵. This absence has effectively removed the possibility of participation in school management and regulation with any power or authority.

Given the absence of active SBMCs across the case-study schools, the space for community participation and parental involvement was restricted to the PTAs, which historically have supported an agenda framed by the school. Five of the six schools reported active PTAs with between 5–8 members, all dominated and chaired by males. This reflects the findings of other studies in northern Nigeria (Poulsen 2009; Antoninis 2010; Unterhalter and Heslop 2011).

⁵ For a review of the literature on the various challenges and limited successes of SBMCs in Nigeria, see [name removed for review, 204–211].

Evidence across the case studies indicated that head teachers used PTA meetings as a disciplinary platform to make the rules of community engagement explicit. Meetings often consisted of a litany of complaints and corrective advice to parents about pupil late coming, absenteeism, dropout or enrolment, pupils' lack of uniform and/or writing materials and community encroachment on school land. Alternatively, meetings were held to request support, in the form of labour and materials, for school development projects. Indeed, one Education Secretary, in specifying that the head teacher's job was '*to enlighten them [the community] on the benefits of education*', made visible the power hierarchies between school and community, and at the same time, between himself and the head.

The use of the PTA as a forum for community regulation rather than dialogue was reported across the school cases with schools and LGEAs using the PTA as a platform to fine parents for non-payment of school funds and to threaten law enforcement concerning breaking boundary walls and dumping rubbish on the compound. Similar punitive attitudes towards non-compliant parents or community members have been noted in other states (Little and Lewis 2012; Pinnock 2012); in Edo State, in the South South, parents were threatened with prosecution by the state government for not sending children to school (*Vanguard*, Jan. 9, 2018).

While attendance at community meetings convened by the PTA was universally said to be low, four of the schools reported issues raised by communities being channelled through PTAs. In only one school (Kilfi), where the PTA had requested that the school display class attendance registers, was there any indication that the school had addressed community concerns. To a large extent, the PTA did not represent parental voices or community concerns but rather propagated the school position in ways that sustained the unidirectional flow of communication from the school to the community. The (re-)production of social hierarchies between teachers and parents had led to parents remaining largely silent about their concerns in the meetings:

Yes, our children come home to complain to us, for example, they sometimes say they didn't get any lesson today or no teacher entered our class today, etc. We don't have the power to confront the teachers; we are afraid of them. (Baobab parent)

Furthermore, some parents felt they could not raise issues or talk back in case their child/ward was then victimised at school. The difficulties of parental participation, especially in marginalised communities, have been pointed out by research elsewhere (Marphatia et al.

2010; Nishimura 2017; Howard et al. 2018). In this study, teachers interpreted parental silence in meetings, or their absence altogether, as being indicative of community indifference to schools, their ignorance, or their disregard for the value of schooling. Teachers made various derogatory comments to the effect that some parents who have no formal education would ‘... prefer their children to rear cattle rather than attend school’, or interestingly, ‘... rather concentrate on looking for what to eat than attend meetings’. Similarly, other community members also commented:

Some parents show an I-don’t-care attitude toward education of their children. (Doya community stakeholder)

Among Muslim families, a dislike of ‘western education’ – the commonly used term for state schooling, even among government education officials – was cited as a major cause of non-enrolment or dropout. In the same vein, in the one Christian-dominated site, a senior LGEA official recounted how some Christian Higgi parents did not allow their children to come to school because of its historical association with a Fulani leader who had tried to convert villagers to Islam. However, it should not be assumed that religious convictions are necessarily a barrier to parents sending children to government schools (see Bano 2018)⁶.

Other studies have noted that low or non-attendance by parents at meetings does not necessarily indicate low levels of interest, but rather could be due to a raft of everyday challenges (e.g. Essuman and Akyeampong 2011 in Ghana; Yamada 2014 in Ethiopia). These include inconvenient timings for meetings, lack of time, lack of employment opportunities for parents and their children, or having more urgent priorities. These all point to the importance of understanding the cultural context and resisting assumptions and stereotypes about ‘others’.

The limited channels for school–community interaction and low levels of engagement were recognised by the LGEA and some school heads. They were aware of the need for greater interaction and engagement with communities, with the PTA mediating between the two:

We interact well with the PTA. Without [a] PTA, schools cannot move forward and that is why we must cooperate because that is [the] only way out for teaching and learning. (Kilfi head teacher)

⁶ The most recent Nigeria Education Data Survey (NPC and RTI International 2016), for example, indicates that nationally, and in the North East, a far higher percentage of Muslim children attend state schools or combine both state and religious schooling than attend Qu’ranic schools alone.

As a community leader, I attend PTA meetings; if there is any problem in school I attend to it and go between school and parents. (Kilfi community leader)

Only one head teacher, however, recognised the need for the school to respond to the community:

They [schools] have to because if they don't do what the community wants, they will be in trouble. (Domingo head teacher)

The greater involvement of religious leaders was raised in four of the case-study sites as one way to improve communications with communities, and indeed in three of the schools, this was said to have resulted in increased enrolment, especially for girls. This matches findings elsewhere in northern Nigeria (Adediran 2010; UNICEF 2012).

In summary, while the inclusion of community participation is central to educational decentralisation, there was little evidence in this study of satisfactory communications or consultations between the community and the schools through official channels. Despite some communication from schools to communities via PTAs, the limited presence and voice of ordinary community members in either the PTA or SBMC precluded them from engagement in school management decisions, which left the aspirations to decentralised educational governance in abeyance. This was compounded by a unidirectional flow of communication from the school to the community and the perpetuation of a deficit discourse about parents which instantiates an asymmetrical social hierarchy in which the school and its needs are positioned above those of parents and other community members. This power asymmetry, however, appeared to be widely accepted by many respondents.

Regulation and the school boundary

In this section, we explore social geographies to consider how schools are established in their community through the material and symbolic work of their boundaries. In advance of this analysis, we provide brief descriptions of the boundaries in each case-study school.

Case-study boundaries

The two urban schools in the state capital both had a hard, continuous perimeter fence or wall and school gates that were kept locked and staffed by security guards. The reduced visibility offered by a wall adds to a sense of privacy and accentuates the formal purpose of the school by making the institution appear more imposing – according it greater social status – and the

boundary far less permeable. Nevertheless, the boundary of both schools provided a continuous material enclosure of the compound that was vital to controlling who entered and left the school. The provincial urban schools had partial, and more porous perimeters. Though both had a main entrance and the vestiges of gates, the unpaid security guards had long since left. In the two rural schools, there was little evidence of a material boundary, neither school had gates, and they were openly accessible from multiple directions.

School discipline

School and classroom boundaries are crucial to the disciplinary regime of schooling and are key axes of regulation in the everyday operation of a school. They ensure that pupils and teachers remain within the school's spatial confines (and once in school, within the confines of the classroom) at particular times of the day, according to its temporal regime, as articulated in the school timetable. The time of school arrival and entry within the school space were always heavily policed by teachers on duty and/or prefects. This was clearly difficult in schools with a broken or un-demarcated perimeter, as pointed out by a Doya parent:

Teachers can't catch late-comers because pupils can decide to come into the school at any angle.

Like this parent above, there was general agreement among stakeholders across the schools that sanctions should be applied to pupil late-comers; they were often severely punished by being caned or assigned physical labour. In this sense, many parents tacitly acknowledged the school's authority to regulate its spatial and temporal boundary and to punish those pupils who transgressed in this way. In five of the schools, it was even reported that parents brought their children to teachers to be punished. That said, in two schools the excessive use of physical punishment also caused friction between parents and schools, resulting in parental incursion onto the school premises, which we discuss below.

In urban Metropolis, with its well demarcated physical boundary, rather than being beaten, late-comers were refused entry to school. This drew criticism from some parents:

On the issue of boys coming late, we want teachers to flog them and allow him to enter class. But to send him back home, he will leave school and will not return home, that will make him more stubborn and he will not read again. (Metropolis parent)

The rigidity of the temporal regime of schools was reported as an area of tension with some members of the community in Domingo and Doya since it was often at odds with their daily

and seasonal rhythms (Dunne and Adzahlie-Mensah 2015; Humphreys et al. 2015). Pupils were punished for coming late, regardless of the circumstances e.g. the family requirement to do chores, go to the farm or attend Qu'ranic school earlier in the morning.

The school boundary was also a site of contestation in relation to staff discipline. Echoing research elsewhere in Nigeria, and in Sub-Saharan Africa more generally (Bold et al. 2017), teacher absenteeism was a major problem in five of the six schools, and often a bone of contention with parents. Discussion with parents and pupils raised issues about teacher late-coming, or absenteeism later in the day, pointing to their apparent impunity:

Teachers also come late, so why should pupils come early? (Domingo pupil)

Parents when interviewed expressed the need for stricter supervision of teachers. However, these suggestions faced certain resistance. As one male Domingo parent explained:

Often times I come here to check the school and people say we [are] pok[ing our] nose [in things].

Community-initiated efforts to address school quality issues of teacher professionalism and pupil discipline challenged the taken-for-granted social hierarchies between teachers and community members. Although community oversight of school quality is envisaged as a central component of decentralised school governance, questions raised by the community about the capacity of a school to discipline its members produced tensions with teachers. The superior positioning of teachers within local social relations allowed them to foreclose the discursive space promised in the collaborative forum of the PTA and the managing body of the SBMC. This may go some way to explaining the poor operation of decentralisation policies and the significant part played by teachers in this.

Porous boundaries

Incomplete school fencing meant a more porous boundary, which eroded the institutional integrity of the school and inevitably made it more difficult to regulate teachers' and pupils' comings and goings during the school day. Even in the urban schools with relatively robust physical boundaries, pupils had made makeshift entry and exit points, cutting laddered footholds in the more secluded places in the wall.

The lack of basic water and sanitation within five of the case-study sites also forced pupils and teachers to disregard the boundary and leave the school compound. In rural Kanti, for example, there was a longstanding dispute with the community over: ownership of the ‘school’ borehole; the land on which it had been located; responsibility for repairs, and who controlled access to it. Thus, the very location of the school within the spatial geographies of the community produced on-going contestation:

We do have a serious battle with the people on this land issue. (Kanti head teacher)

The dispute represented a questioning of the school’s clearly under-negotiated access to community land and water resources. Located across the road from the main school grounds, the borehole was the only viable water supply for teachers and pupils. Following the initial refusal by the community to allow the school to use the water, further appeals by the school resulted in permission for school access but only until 10am. While this illustrates community resistance to school authority, as well as providing an example of school–community co-operation, the result was that the school boundary was repeatedly crossed for water and sanitation purposes in an unregulated way. It was widely reported across the case studies, that once pupils or teachers had exited the school, very few returned the same day. Evidently, addressing these disputes about space and resources could reinstate the institutional boundary to stem irregular flows out of school and reduce pupil and teacher absenteeism. Indeed, two case-study schools shared water pumps within their grounds with their community. While this was cited as a positive step in building better relationships between the school and community, community access was, nevertheless, regulated according to specific school-based spatial and temporal regimes.

Many school stakeholders regarded improvements to their perimeter boundary as a fundamental development priority:

If I am to change something in this school, I will start by building a fence around the school with a gate ... (Doya SBMC member)

The absence of a continuous material school boundary in four of the schools left them with rather fragile claims to their space and place in the community, and to their institutional integrity. Even in the capital urban schools, where the perimeter boundaries were much more secure, parents and community leaders still wanted increased school security to improve attendance by preventing pupils from exiting the compound.

School security and pupil safety

Pupil safety in and around school has been highlighted as important for sustaining access, especially for girls (Rentaria Lozano and Adebo 2017). The school's institutional capacity to offer a safe and secure space, however, is related strongly both to the permeability of its boundaries and the extent to which community members respect and legitimate the school's regulation of its boundary. In this study, all the schools were situated beside roads, which exposed pupils to some danger getting to and from school – a danger widely recognised by educational stakeholders across Nigeria (Rentaria Lozano and Adebo 2017). In four cases that had broken or no fencing, the road presented a persistent risk, with incidents of pupils being hit by motor vehicles reported in two different schools. The danger was magnified in these cases as the porosity of the boundaries also meant that some pupils drifted in and out of school on multiple occasions during school hours – to find water, go to the toilet, do household chores, or seek food, for example.

The regulation of those regarded as legitimate within the school space and those who are not was also important to school safety and security. All schools had formal arrangements for access to the compound and for allowing community members and parents to make appointments to meet the head or other teachers. In Baobab, the school also offered its computer and library facilities for community use and managed this even during out-of-school hours. However, in the provincial urban schools, with gaps in the perimeter boundaries, numerous outsiders were observed hanging around the school entrances often making it difficult for teachers and pupils to enter the school. They persisted in spite of the school posting duty teachers and prefects to police the gates. A school's success in policing its boundary depended largely on community acceptance and legitimation of its authority and their compliance with the school's temporal and spatial regulation.

Yet, the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate visitors into school space was not always clear cut. In particular, safety concerns were raised when older and often over-age boys who attended adjoining secondary schools, or were waiting for their later shift, loitered around the primary school buildings during lessons and breaks. In Domingo, for example, boys from other Junior Secondary schools used the football pitch as a circuit for their bikes that they rented out to other pupils.

Hawkers constituted another case in point. In all schools, they were prevalent and largely tolerated, with each school operating its own regime of control. The schools with more robust physical perimeters had a restricted period when hawkers were permitted within the school gates – generally at break and lunchtime. Schools with open boundaries allowed hawkers to line the nominal border and/or the side of the road, where pupils and teachers went out to buy from them. From time to time, some schools instituted bans or restricted their access to the school space as well as to the pupils and teachers. Nevertheless, hawkers often overstayed on the compound and in the two provincial urban schools, pupils, sometimes sent by teachers, were observed coming out of class to buy snacks like sugar cane, *moimoi*, cakes and oranges. In one school, hawkers were even observed entering the classroom during a lesson to make transactions. Further difficulties in regulating incursions by outsiders were provoked presented by the young pupils who were themselves also hawkers and stored their wares under their benches during lesson times.

In summary, the work of the school boundary is to mark the space of the school within the community landscape. It is the front-line interface with the community and, as further illustrated below, challenges to its legitimacy threaten institutional integrity and the everyday operation of schools.

Transgressing the boundary

Although head teachers across all case-study schools described their relations with the community as cordial, the spatial and temporal definition of the school and its legitimate place within the community were constantly challenged by different forms of community incursion or direct action both in and out of school hours. Community members variously used school buildings and compounds for animals, recreation purposes, as thoroughfares or for dumping rubbish, as other studies have found (Boulton, Jackson and Oliver 2009; Pinnock 2012; Universal Basic Education Commission (UBEC) 2012).

The main infringements occurred across the more porous boundaries of the rural and provincial urban schools. Minor incursions recorded in Domingo and Doya included dissatisfied parents who allegedly marched into school without appointments and questioned the legitimacy of the teachers' authority and the sanctions they used on their children:

Some mothers do come to school to insult teachers when their children are beaten excessively. (Doya parent)
Parents attack teachers for caning their wards. (Domingo parent)
Parents molest teachers when pupils are disciplined. (Domingo parent)

More often, however, incursions onto the school during school hours were made by unsanctioned, ‘illegitimate’ individuals or groups. These posed a potential security risk to pupils and/or the school premises, in terms of vandalism, which staff, pupils and parents complained about in three of the schools. One of the most noteworthy cases was in Baobab, where ‘Indian hemp-smokers’ and ‘drug-takers’ were variously reported and observed lying around the latrines; their presence scared off pupils from using the facilities, making it more likely that they would leave the compound to relieve themselves, and – as mentioned earlier – not return to school. These outsiders were also blamed for persistently making access holes through in the perimeter wall:

Some bad boys from the community break the wall to create a passage.... And you know these bad boys also use the school as a hiding place in the evening to smoke and take drugs. (female teacher, Baobab)

Other groups that breached the school perimeter during school hours included *almajirai*⁷ who begged for alms around the school gate in Domingo, but who also entered the compound at times. So too did the young male ‘area boys’ of Baobab, who sat on the wall in the morning before school and verbally abused pupils, kicking them if they answered back, and according to the head teacher, they sometimes followed pupils into class to pull them out. In Kanti, on one research visit, a young local adult male was found seated among a group of young female pupils during break, in what appeared to be a rather irregular social engagement.

In three schools, community members exhibited blatant disregard for the spatial and temporal integrity of the school and its symbolic definition as within and yet separate from the community. They reportedly used the classrooms at night and at weekends for partying, drug-taking and sleeping in. In Kanti, several respondents confirmed that in the evening the compound became an extension of the bar across the road; while the head teacher had succeeded in requesting that the bar be kept closed during the day, the community incursions at night continued, often leaving the classrooms in an insanitary condition. Indeed, in the four schools with the most porous boundaries, reports were made of community members

⁷ Young boys who often came from other states to study Islam with a local mallam.

defecating in classrooms after school hours. This all needed to be cleared in the pre-school cleaning duties, usually performed by young female pupils. These intrusions added to the less than adequate water and toilet facilities in schools to present a significant health risk in a context in which ill-health is a major barrier to school attendance (Humphreys with Crawford 2014; NPC and RTI International 2016). These examples illustrate the extent to which the school space was appropriated and utilised by the community in ways that challenged the functioning of the school boundary as a physical and symbolic dividing practice in ways that substantially eroded institutional integrity.

Multiple tensions between the school and the community related to land use and rights of way. Grounds were constantly traversed: by local pastoralists, grazing their goats, sheep and cattle on what they considered to be established trails across the unfenced rural schools; and by all sorts of people taking short-cuts across the provincial urban schools with more porous perimeters. In Doya, herders sheltered their animals in classrooms at night, and sometimes even used vacant classrooms during the day; they also reportedly drove their animals close to the classrooms and were heard to shout comments at pupils and teachers during lessons. The herding and sheltering of livestock across school land inevitably resulted in a trail of animal excreta. This sustained disregard for the spatial enclosure of the school and its temporal regimes was acknowledged by the school head teacher, who had tried to address the issue with a community leader:

[We] tried the traditional leader on the matter, but at any time the matter is discussed it brings tension. I believe it has to be handled with care.

The framing of the issue as a matter of community land rights or history related to determining school space was not discussed. Motor vehicles – usually motorbikes – were also occasionally driven by outsiders across the compound of the two rural schools. In the more urban schools of Baobab and Domingo, the exercising of perceived rights of access led to the breaking down of the school's physical boundaries to (re-)open thoroughfares across school compounds for pedestrians, bicycles, motor bikes and cars to facilitate access to residential areas, markets or roads during school hours. Additionally, in Domingo, a route led across the school to a hotel located just behind the school boundary. Despite repeated efforts to rebuild school boundary walls and gates, community members persistently broke them down to enable free movement across the school compound. Smaller holes made for pedestrian traffic, were also used by pupils to enter or exit the school compound without being seen by teachers or prefects.

Baobab provided the most striking example of community contestation: a major thoroughfare that bisected the school compound and separated the main school and pre-school area was constantly in use by community members both during and out of school time. The head teacher described futile attempts to close the road:

We have blocked the passage dug through the school wall and have tried to stop people from passing or driving through the school compound but they still do.

The main gate had been repaired or replaced several times – sometimes with the aid of community members – but had repeatedly been broken down. Further exploration revealed that this thoroughfare predated the construction of Baobab School and parents complained that the community had not been widely consulted about the wall round the school. It was a similar story with the continued dumping of waste in corners of the school compound since historically the land had been used as a rubbish dump by the community.

The antagonistic community–school relations in Baobab and in three of the other case-study schools also strongly hint at limited negotiations among stakeholders, especially ordinary community members, and an absence of a consensus about the siting of schools. While this may be the consequence of assumptions of the unequivocally positive welcome for a school in any community, it had left these schools with difficulties in claiming school space, securing their boundary and ensuring the safety of their members.

Encroachment onto school land for building development by some sectors of the community in Baobab and Domingo constituted another source of conflict and a further breaching of the schools' borders. In Domingo, the head teacher alleged that community leaders were selling land demarcated by the LGEA as part of the school compound. He considered this to be the school's greatest challenge. Such encroachments constitute a serious threat to schools across Nigeria, especially in urban areas. This has been widely reported in the national press (e.g. Kayode-Adedji 2013; *Vanguard*, Jan. 14, 2018), and acknowledged in the recent assessment of basic education (Renteria Lozano and Adebo 2017). Conversely, three of the case-study schools – including Domingo – had reportedly encroached on community terrain, by building teachers' houses on land that the community did not consider to be owned by the schools or education authorities.

Conclusions

In this paper, we have used ethnographic case-study data in educationally disadvantaged Adamawa State, North East Nigeria, to explore the troubled issues of community–school relations against the policyscape of educational decentralisation. Our research indicates that there is a very restricted space for communities to engage with schools and certainly not within the envisaged management functions associated with SBMCs. While these are largely not operational in Adamawa or other states in Nigeria, there is evidence of some parental involvement in PTAs, although this offers limited forms of community participation that tend to respond only to the school agenda. This, in turn, circumscribes the ways in which the community can engage with schools, denying them a say in school decision-making and development, thereby shifting power and authority back to schools, teachers and local educational government. Not only were women under-represented in the official fora of community representation, but local social hierarchies helped to produce a flow of communication from the school (or from the LG EA via the school) to the community which failed to engage, or even silenced, some community members in this formal forum. The ways in which these social asymmetries constrained parental/community engagement were not recognised by teachers, who sustained a deficit construction of parents and the wider community. Importantly, a deficit discourse is often echoed by government officials when top-down policies fail at the local level and/or when there is local resistance to the rationalities driving national and international policy agendas.

Our theoretical understanding of policy as being realised in interaction with different social, political and cultural contexts and our application of the concepts of ‘power geometries’ (Massey) and ‘dividing practices’ (Foucault) have also enabled us to illuminate some of the complexities of school–community relations through exploration of the spatial and temporal boundaries of schools. In considering the significance of the boundary to school disciplinary regimes, we highlighted the ways this regulatory axis was contested by pupils, teachers and community members alike. The unregulated flow into and out of school space challenged the everyday operation of the school, threatened student health and hygiene, encouraged teacher and student absenteeism and potentially student drop-out, and adversely affected educational quality. Explicit community action, often related to land-use and historical rights of way, punctured the security of the school’s spatial enclosure within the community and with that, its institutional integrity. These are illustrations of local resistance to the dividing practices and

forms of governmentality required to establish the school within a community. They are also indicative of limited community consultation about the implications of expanding schools within their localities.

Our study also demonstrates that the specifics of the locality are highly germane to the ways in which policy might be operationalised. In Adamawa, for example, the limited intergenerational experience of schooling and/or engagement in local politics may indicate that the imperatives for compulsory schooling and genuine community participation in education, articulated in international and national policies, might be difficult to implement.

In the wider context of international and national pressures to expand access to basic education, the tension with local communities also suggests that formal schooling is neither universally desired – at least not in its current form – nor regarded as benign; nor do school imperatives necessarily always coincide with those of all community members. Local social hierarchies, the lack of community voice – beyond that of a select few – and the absence of consultation with communities in all their diversity have all contributed to community resistance and resultant difficulties with school security and pupil safety. The assumptions and rationalities supporting a vision of community participation in the local management of schools as currently imagined appear inadequate (Stenvoll-Wells and Sayed 2012; Edwards and Klees 2015). As shown elsewhere, it is evident that if community participation is to work, relations between state and community actors need to be more equitable (Essuman and Akyeampong 2011; Yamada 2014). More critically perhaps, international, national and state educational policy makers, planners and administrators need to recognise that the policy process is much more complex than the functional description of decentralisation implies (Edwards 2012; Stenvoll-Wells and Sayed 2012; Edwards and Klees 2015). The diverse and complex social relations, power dynamics and everyday practices in particular contexts have a tremendous impact on the achievement of intended policy outcomes. These multiplicities therefore need to occupy a far more central position within policy processes and evaluations. In our disruption of the hegemonic linear temporal discourse of development and our focus on the spatial within different communities, we hope to have shed light on some of the complexities of the local, which is subject to policy reforms and critical to the achievement of policy objectives.

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